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ABSTRACT

Motivation is the normal state of the individual, and the language teacher is responsible for identifying the individual nature of the student's motivation and directing it through his design of learning activities. The personal goals of the students should be kept in mind; the subject matter should be what interests the student, and the characteristics of the students must be considered. The teacher should use imagination in curriculum planning and should adapt and adjust the curriculum to his own students. The language teacher must know how to use the motivation which already exists to increase the student's knowledge of the new language. (VM)

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Motivating Through Classroom Techniques

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How often we hear teachers complaining about their students:

"What can I do? They just lack motivation."

This, of course, is an impossible statement. Every living organism to survive must have some motivation. Frymier has defined motivation as "that which gives direction and intensity to behavior."[1] This type of definition emphasizes the fact that little is known about motivation which, in psychological terms, is a construct inferred from the way an organism behaves. (By the direction and intensity of the behavior we infer something about the inner state of the organism, and in order to be able to discuss and investigate this "something" we call it motivation."

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The complaint: "<u>They just have no motivation to learn to speak English</u>" may be a more accurate description of the behavior of some students in school, but even this statement usually reflects a lack of realization on the part of the speaker of the complex and individual nature of motivation. Certain experiments have been performed where teachers had the opportunity to instruct by way of an intercom system fictitious students and then saw their supposed work. These experiments have shown that the teacher's conviction about the degree of intensity of a student's motivation may reflect the picture the teacher has created for himself of this particular student rather than the student's actual psychological state.[2.] The students to whom our teacher is referring in the complaint just voiced may not lack motivation to learn to speak English but may have found what seems to the teacher to be substandard, or even incorrect, English quite sufficient for their communicative purposes in the community in which they live. This may also be the only variety of English they hear from those with whom they wish to identify: parents or neighborhood associates. All indispensable communication, as far as they are concerned, may take place in Spanish or Turkish or Navajo. The real problem for the teacher may be: "<u>My students have no motivation</u>

to learn what I teach in my English class."

So the question, "How can I motivate my students?" is not well formulated, nor is the question: "How can I motivate my students to learn?" Our students may not appear to be learning what we are earnestly trying to teach them, but every organism, nevertheless, is continually learning. As John Holt tries to show in How Children Fail, our students may be learning in our classrooms to protect themselves from embarrassment, from humiliation, and from other emotional concomitants of failure; they may be learning to give us "the right answer and the right chatter."[3.] According to Postman and Weingartner "a classroom is an environment and ... the way it is organized carries the burden of what people will learn from it":[4.] consequently, some of our students may be learning from our classrooms that the use of English is a rather meaningless, mechanical activity, or even that it is a vehicle for a teacher's monologues. In either case it would seem to them clearly unrelated to their own concerns or interests.

There are two main strands of psychological thought on the question of motivation:[5.] the hedonistic strand which includes the various theories of reinforcement or reward, and the ego-involvement strand in which the indi-

vidual's self-image and level of aspiration play the determining role.

The hedonistic approach goes back at least as far as Thorndike's Law of Effect. It is discernible in the explanations of many psychologists and notably in those which emphasize reinforcement or reward, and in the pleasure principle of Freud. According to this approach, the individual organism in its relations with the environment is continually seeking to safeguard a state of equilibrium or balance of tension which it finds pleasurable. Excess of motivation disrupts this balance and causes increase in tension which the organism actively seeks to reduce by purposeful goal-directed behavior. Just as excess of motivation is painful to the organism, so is frustration in its goal-seeking efforts which prevents the organism from regaining its state of equilibrium. In this view, motivation can be looked upon as a continual process of individual adjustment to the environment. The individual actively seeks experiences which are pleasurable and avoids those which are painful. This parsimonious view of motivation would seem to provide a straightforward guideline for the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, because of the complexity of the inner state of each organism what is pleasurable for one is not necessarily pleasurable for another, and the

teacher must keep these individual differences in mind.

Basically this view would indicate that the teacher should capitalize on the learner's motivated state by keeping the work within the capacity of each student so that he experiences success which is tension-reducing and rewarding. This is the basis of the programmed learning approach. In a well-designed programmed text attainable goals, clearly discernible in carefully elaborated steps, act as incentives and, as each is completed, the student is given immediate confirmation of the correctness or incorrectness of his response. This continual feedback provides reinforcement of what has been learned so that each student is motivated to continue to reproduce responses which have been rewarded and to put forth effort in the hope of experiencing further reinforcing success. Ideally such a stage can be reached by each student only in a completely individualized program where each person proceeds at his own pace. Unfortunately completely individualized work as presently developed in programmed texts or computer-assisted-instruction appears to conflict with the concept of language as primarily a vehicle of communication in which at least two persons by their interaction influence and modify each other's production.

We must wait for further technological development of audio components and more imaginative programming before this disability can be overcome. In any case sophisticated materials of this type are still beyond the financial capacities of most schools. In the average classroom the teacher does the best he can in distributing reinforcement within the class group, or within smaller groups for particular activities, hoping in this way to shape behavior progressively in the direction he desires. The result is a classroom largely teacher-dominated as the teacher seeks to manipulate the environment to provide the most favorable conditions for inducing correct language behavior on the part of as many of the students as possible.

The second distinctive view of motivation which is reflected in much modern writing on educational problems maintains that the individual is continually seeking that which enhances his self as he perceives it, that is, that he is striving to achieve what he perceives as his potential. The student is, then, motivated at first in a general, non-specific way in any situation--in other words, he is ready to take from any situation what there is in it for him. This initial motivation energizes and directs the student's behavior, causing him to attend to and focus on

what is new in his environment. This attention is facilitative of learning but must be caught and maintained. It is at this stage that the teacher uses interest-arousing techniques to involve the student. The student is more readily involved if the teacher builds on areas of concern to him at his particular stage of development, thus making the new learning meaningful and increasing its incentive value. Many psychologists believe that the human organism possesses certain autonomous impulses such as curiosity, the desire to know and to understand, the desire to play and explore, and the impulse to manipulate features of the environment. These provide raw material with which the teacher can work to interest the student in the learning process. Through success in language activities and through the satisfaction of recognized and recognizable achievement the student comes to take an interest in the subject for its own sake (that is, an intrinsic interest in learning to know and use English) and what is sometimes called a cognitive drive which is self-sustaining then develops.[5.] The development of such an interest in learning English for its own sake is, of course, the final aim of the teacher of English and the best assurance that the student will continue to learn

and to seek opportunities to use English after the classroom has ceased to provide his learning environment.

In this latter view, a student's reaction to a stimulus is not predictable from the external conditions as the teacher sees them, but is determined by the student's individual perception of reality. The student may perceive a particular situation as a threat and withdraw from it or react unpredictably to counteract it. This is likely to happen quite frequently in an authoritarian classroom and many English-teaching classrooms are authoritarian: 'the teacher knows English well, the student does not, and therefore the teacher is always right and always correcting the student. In such situations many a student is forced to adopt strategies to protect his self-image even, in some cases, to the extent of preferring to be wrong in the first place because at least in this way he knows where he stands and the outcome is less painful. Another student may set himself unrealistic goals which he cannot possibly attain because certain failure which he can blame on someone else is less damaging for him than unexpected failure where he expected to succeed. The teacher who understands this personal character of motivation can help individual students to set themselves attainable goals, no matter what their degree of aptitude, thus building up

their self-confidence and increasing their motivation.

Whichever approach to motivation we accept (and as classroom teachers we can learn something of value from each of them),[6.] it is clear that motivation is a normal state of the individual. It is for the teacher to identify its individual character and channel it through his design of learning activities. Of itself, motivation is merely raw material.

In the scope of this paper I can consider only a few of the implications of the theoretical positions described, but in each case I shall show how classroom practice in a particular situation will be affected if what is known about motivation is kept in mind.

First of all, <u>the student is motivated to learn</u>. We begin, whether we realize it or not, with a motivated organism in front of us. But what, we must ask ourselves, is this student motivated to learn? Perhaps he is motivated to learn enough English to communicate his needs, but not to slog away at uninteresting exercises.

But aren't these exercises necessary? the teacher may ask. What does "learning English" consist of?

--learning to pronounce certain sounds in certain environments;

--learning to use certain lexical items in certain contexts;

--learning to manipulate certain patterns which we can then incorporate into more extensive patterns to express the fullness of our meaning;

--learning to recognize sound-symbol relationships;

--learning to extract meaning from sound or graphic sequences?

As listed, these activities may seem quite irrelevant to Maria or George.

So we narrow down our aims more and more, and we state our behavioral objectives very precisely: we want Maria and George

--to learn to distinguish /I/ from /i/ and to learn to pronounce /tʃ/;

--to learn to ask an information or a yes-no question;

--to learn the parts of the body.

Maria or George may still not be motivated to learn what the teacher has prepared. It is fine for the teacher to "state behavioral objectives" but Maria and George will still not learn unless they see these objectives as relevant to their personal goals. Maria may want to be able to buy

some potato chips without being asked to repeat what she said over and over again. George may want to be able to ask the price of a comic book or to find out how a battery-powered fire engine works. Carmelita may want to be able to say "That's my ball."

How do we achieve our behavioral objectives and those of our students? For some teachers an exercise is an exercise is an exercise (or a drill is a drill is a drill). All exercises (or drills) can be personalized. Only if distinguishing /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ are seen as communication problems will Maria be interested, and pronunciation problems can be treated in a communication situation. So can parts of the body, but not in the old format where the teacher asks: "Do I have two heads? Do you have three feet?" This is not even a pretence at authentic communication. A game of Simon Says where children have to touch or move parts of the body in the rapid sequence of the competition is a communication situation. Listening to something to which one has to react by drawing something or doing something is communication. Reading something to find out information for one's own interest or in order to tell someone else something is communication. A student who says: "Where are you going tonight?" to another

student and expects a reply is learning to communicate. If he says exactly the same words in a mechanical fashion as part of a drill or dialogue because the teacher says this is what he should do, he is learning to do an exercise: he is learning to give "the right answer and the right chatter." This psychological difference is crucial. Remember that the student learns from the classroom, from your structuring of the learning activities, whether English is for communication or not. He learns whether it is part of his reality or just some tedious, artificial chore which someone "up there" has ordained he must perform. Exercises, oral or written, should always be framed as communication exercises: with a credible sequence of ideas and with some relevance, to the class group and the class situation (which are the child's reality during his school years). If you lack imagination, learn to involve that of your students. Remember that a student whose interests and concerns are considered respectable and worthwhile in the classroom develops an enhanced perception of himself which increases his motivation to involve himself in purposive behavior within the class group.

What about the child's impulses to play, to explore, to manipulate? These can certainly be harnessed to the

language teacher's endeavor. Recently I saw a first grade class in an elementary school bilingual project practicing the full paradigm in Spanish of the verb "to go"--I go, you go, he goes, we all go.... A few minutes earlier they had all been lying on mats for their rest period. What an opportunity was being missed! Children of this age love to imitate and mimic. They love make-believe and they identify rapidly with roles which they act out with great enthusiasm. They love movement and they can hardly curb their desire to express themselves vocally. They love stories with much repetition and they insist on each story being repeated exactly as before. Repetitive rhymes and songs are their delight. Instead of look-and-listen activities, or even listen-and-repeat activities, they become absorbed in <u>listen-do-repeat activities</u> where they concentrate on the active meaning of what they are saying. And they practice spontaneously at home, showing Mummy and Daddy how it is done, and proudly singing their new song to aunts and uncles. What an opportunity was being missed in that classroom by an elementary school teacher who, suddenly asked to teach Spanish, could think only of how she was taught long ago, instead of exploiting her knowledge of the characteristics and interests of the young child.

(In this class too, may I add, many of the children spoke Spanish as a mother tongue.)

It is not only very young children who learn through movement. Many students from lower socio-economic levels where the home environment is not verbal and abstract respond to concrete material for which they see an immediate application. They enjoy learning words and phrases which they can employ immediately in the context of the class or with other children--in the neighborhood or in the school ground. They also learn through activity: through seeing, hearing, touching, manipulating, and through role-playing. The teacher should use visual presentations (flash cards, drawings, projected material); things students can hold, open, shut, pass to each other; music, songs with tapes, guitars, drums; action songs, action poems. The vocabulary taught should be practical; the characters and incidents they hear or read about should never appear to be "prissy" or effeminate. By building on the known characteristics of different types of students we are using their existing motivation for our pedagogical purposes.

We must find out what our students are interested in. This is our subject matter. As language teachers we are the most fortunate of teachers--all subjects are ours. Whatever the children want to communicate about,

whatever they want to read about, is our subject matter. The "informal classroom" we hear so much of these days[7]. is ours if we are willing to experiment. Do our students watch T.V.? This we can use by incorporating material they are all watching into our classroom programs. The essence of language teaching is providing conditions for language learning--using the motivation which exists to increase our student's knowledge of the new language: we are limited only by our own caution, by our own hesitancy to do whatever our imagination suggests to us to create situations in which students feel involved--individually, in groups, whichever is appropriate for the age-level of our students in the situation in which we meet them. We need not be tied to a curriculum created for another situation or another group. We must adapt, innovate, improvise, in order to meet the student where he is and channel his motivation.

As we design our program it should be possible to involve students in the selection of activities according to their personality preferences. Should all students, even the inarticulate, be expected to want to develop primarily the speaking skill? Some children reared on television may feel more at ease if allowed to look and listen with minimal oral participation until they feel

the urge to contribute: these children will learn far more if allowed to develop according to their own personality patterns than if they are forced to chatter when they have nothing to say. Teachers, too, should be aware of psychological research which shows that native language development proceeds at a different rate for girls and boys,[8.] with the girls advancing more rapidly, and that the effect of this difference is cumulative. At certain stages, then, one may expect girls to express themselves orally more readily than boys and this again affects differentially their reaction to chattering in a foreign language. Some students may prefer to range beyond the rest of the class in reading and for such children graded reading material for individual selection, covering a wide variety of topics should be readily available.

Such individualization of choices requires imaginative planning by the classroom teacher who should be willing and ready to go beyond a uniform diet for all comers as soon as children's individual styles of learning make themselves apparent. An experimental study reported by Politzer and Weiss shows that "better results were obtained by the pupils of those teachers who went beyond the procedures strictly prescribed by

the curriculum, teachers who were concerned with supplementing the curriculum rather than merely implementing it." It seems, according to this report, that "the efficiency of the individual teacher increase(d) with the amount of his personal stake and personal contribution to the instructional processes."[9.] Can this be less so for the student himself? We know that involvement in personally selected tasks is intrinsically motivating to normal students. This further source of motivation we must not neglect if we wish to channel the student's natural energies.

Ausubel has pointed out that "motivation is as much an effect as a cause of learning."[10.] The relationship between the two, he says, is "typically reciprocal rather than unidirectional."[11.] By this he means that when we capitalize on the student's initial motivation, focus it, and direct it into satisfying ego-enhancing learning experiences then this satisfaction motivates the student to further learning along these lines. Nothing breeds success like success. As one meaningful learning task after another is mastered, the attractiveness of the tasks increases and the student is motivated to "practice, rehearse, and perform what he has already learned."[12.] What more could we seek as language teachers?

In all of this who is the experimenter? It is not the expert nor the consultant but the classroom teacher--

the teacher who one day says to himself: "I think I'll reorganize what I have been doing and see if some of these things I have been hearing really work." Progress in improvement of the conditions for learning comes not through funded projects here and there but through the thousands, the millions of classrooms in operation every hour of the week. There has been much enthusiasm in recent years for educational improvement, but from a study of some two hundred and sixty classrooms Goodlad concluded in 1969 that "most of the so-called educational reform movement has been blunted on the classroom door."[13.] What of the bilingual program? What of the English as a second language and second dialect programs throughout the country? Their fate too lies behind the classroom door. In other words they are your personal responsibility. Think of this next time you go into your classroom.

N O T E S

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5. D. Ausubel, Educational Psychology. A Cognitive View (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), p. 367-8.

6. The subject of motivation and implications from theory for classroom practice is dealt with at length in W. M. Rivers, The Psychologist and the Foreign-Language Teacher (Chicago, 1964), Chapter 9.

7. See, for instance, C. E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom (Random House, 1970).

8. Dorothea A. McCarthy, "Sex Differences in Language Development" in R. G. Kuhlen and G. G. Thompson eds., Psychological Studies of Human Development (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 349-353.

9. R. L. Politzer and L. Weiss, "Characteristics and Behaviors of the Successful Foreign Language Teacher," (Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, Technical Report No. 5, April 1969), pp. 69-70.

10. Ausubel (1968), p. 393.

11. Ausubel (1968), p. 365.

12. Ausubel (1968), p. 385.

13. Quoted in Silberman (1970), p. 159.